

**Department of Natural Resources**  
**TESTIMONY on AB 672**  
**NEW HUNTER MENTORING BILL**  
**Testimony By: Chief Warden Randy Stark**  
**January, 16, 2008**

The Department recognizes the importance of getting people of all ages involved in outdoor activities. These outdoor experiences promote an appreciation of the natural world, which in turn correlates to being responsible stewards of our natural resources.

Providing youth outdoor experiences is particularly important in passing on the conservation ethic to the next generation. To this end, in recent years the Department has promoted youth participation in outdoor experiences through an initiative called "No Child Left Inside". This initiative includes such programs as the Learn to Hunt Program, youth fishing programs, and participation events such as the annual Youth Outdoor Education Exposition attended by approximately 4000 fifth graders. In the law enforcement program, each field conservation warden work plans to partner with local and statewide conservation organizations to create outdoor opportunities for youth in their local areas.

One of the Department of Natural Resources major goals is to provide for safe and enjoyable outdoor recreational opportunities. Consistent with this goal, the Department, with the assistance of thousands of volunteer instructors, has for decades administered several successful safety education programs for hunting, boating, snowmobile, ATV, bowhunting, and trapping. Each year, thousands of students graduate from these programs.

The goal of providing safe and enjoyable outdoor recreational opportunities also obligates the Department to make public safety its primary consideration in evaluating new proposals such as those in AB672.

It is important to note that this bill does not lower the minimum hunting age. The minimum age a hunter education graduate can hunt without adult supervision remains at 14.

This bill proposes a "New Hunter" mentoring program. It creates a mentoring opportunity that allows any person with a hunting license age 10 or older to experience hunting under very controlled conditions without first attending a hunter education course. The proposed language still requires any person born after 1-1-1973 who desires to hunt on their own outside the controlled conditions to successfully complete a hunter education course, just like they are required to do now.

Upon review of the mentoring program as proposed in AB 672, we believe that the conditions created will not jeopardize public safety. The basis for this opinion is as follows:

1. The bill allows only one firearm, bow and arrow, or crossbow between the mentor and the person being mentored.
2. A person may not serve as a mentor for more than one person at a time.
3. The mentor must at all times be within arms reach of the person being mentored. This sets up a situation where the mentor can immediately intervene, if needed.

These controlled conditions combine to enhance safety by focusing all the attention of the mentor on the person being mentored.

It should be noted that the "one gun", "arms reach", and "one to one" mentoring conditions contained in this proposed mentoring program are considerably stricter than current law that allows a 12 and 13 year old to hunt within sight and voice distance of a parent or guardian.

In terms of the mentor qualifications, the proposed mentoring program requires:

1. The mentor must be at least 18 years old.
2. If the mentor is not the parent or guardian, they may only act as a mentor for someone under age 18 if they have the approval of the parent or guardian.
3. The mentor, if born on or after January 1, 1973 (now age 35 and under), must be a licensed hunter and a hunter education graduate.
4. The mentor, if born before January 1, 1973, must be a licensed hunter.

Within a generation, most all mentors will be required under this bill to be both a licensed hunter and a hunter education graduate.

It should also be noted that for hunters ages of 10-17, the bill ultimately puts parents, who are in the best position to know the capabilities and readiness of their son or daughter, in the position to decide if their son or daughter goes hunting. This has always been the case for 12-17 year olds, however, this bill creates another option for parents to consider – hunting with a mentor under the closely controlled mentoring conditions.

### **HUNTING ACCIDENT STATISTICS AND DNR EXPERIENCE WITH THE LEARN TO HUNT PROGRAM**

We'd like to eliminate all accidents because any accident is one too many. Through the efforts of our dedicated core of Hunter Education Instructors over the past 40 years, there have been significant reductions in the number of hunting accidents. In fact, hunting related shooting incidents have declined 31% in the last 10yrs. Today, hunting is as safe as it's ever been in Wisconsin. The national incident rate is 3 per 100,000 participants. The past deer season in Wisconsin was the second safest ever, with an accident rate of 1.06 per 100,000. The success of the Hunter Education Program, coupled with the tireless efforts of thousands of volunteer instructors, will ensure the mentoring program only gets even safer in the future as within a generation, most all mentors will be hunter education graduates.

Hunting accident statistics nationwide suggest the safest combination of hunters are a youth and an adult together, and the least safest combination is two or more youth together without adult supervision. The mentoring opportunities proposed in AB672 promote the safest combination – a youth closely supervised by an adult.

Hunting accident rates from 40 states that have less restrictive conditions than current law in Wisconsin, 33 with no minimum age, **do not** show any increase in hunting accidents associated with younger hunters when supervised by an adult.

This is consistent with our experience with the Learn to Hunt Program. The Learn-To-Hunt program provides special youth hunts for waterfowl, turkey, deer, and bear in an effort to recruit new hunters. The Learn to hunt programs focus the attention on novice hunters of all ages. Similar to the requirements of the mentorship program created by this bill, the mentors in the DNR's Learn-To-Hunt programs may not carry a 2<sup>nd</sup> firearm or bow.

In 2004, we intentionally lowered the minimum age for participation in the Learn to Hunt program from age 11 to 10. Although at the time we did not capture the age of participants, since August 2004 there has been approximately 213 Learn to Hunt events involving approximately 3900 novice participants age 10 and older who hunted under the supervision of a mentor without incident.

### **TARGET SHOOTING**

AB672 also fixes a problem we have been aware of and trying to get fixed for many years regarding the limited opportunities for youth under age 12 to target practice with a firearm. The children's criminal code which restricts the possession of firearms by anyone under age 18 already provides an exception to allow a person of any age under age 18 to possess firearm for the purpose of target practice if under the supervision of an adult. This bill corrects a conflict between the Chapter 948 and Chapter 29. The legal situation created by these conflicting laws has been a significant impediment to introducing young people to outdoor activities through shooting sports.

### **ENFORCEABILITY**

As is the case with all new laws, we also want to ensure that they are enforceable. This law is enforceable once the Department takes steps to develop a mechanism to quickly and clearly identify on the license and/or back tag that the hunter being contacted is a "Mentored Hunter". Once able to make this distinction quickly in the field upon a license check, wardens will be able to ensure compliance with the controlled conditions of the mentored hunt.

### **HUNTING IN AMERICA - A CHALLENGE WITH A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY**

For over 120 years, hunters in the United States have played a key role in the North American Model of Conservation. The conservation movement, initiated by hunters and other conservation minded people, formed the foundations for conservation, wildlife management and conservation funding policies that we continue to benefit from today. Hunters were then, and continue today, to be at the forefront of these efforts.

In Wisconsin, the hunting tradition has been an integral component of our history, culture, and economy. This bill is directly related to the future of hunting in Wisconsin. We need four ingredients for the future of hunting: healthy wildlife, access to a place to hunt, hunters, and a public that accepts hunting. In terms of providing access to places to hunt for current and future generations of hunters, the recently re-authorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund was a significant step in the right direction. This bill, AB672, focuses on the third factor – creating a safe and effective mechanism to recruit new hunters.

Currently, there is concern nationwide about declining participation in hunting. On national level – between 1996 – 2006, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation found there has been a 10% decline in the number of hunters. From 2001-2006, the 2006 United States Fish and Wildlife Service National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation found a 4% decline.

The implications of declining number of hunters for fish and wildlife conservation are many – the future vitality of hunting related conservation organizations, changes in the fish and wildlife program funding streams, reduced ability to control wildlife populations through hunting, and reduced

economic impact of hunting. All will impact the future. The recruitment of new hunters is an essential element to the continuation of wildlife management and conservation. The timing of establishing a mentoring program that safely increases new hunter opportunity is important. The demographic challenge of hunter recruitment has a window of opportunity embedded in it.

While Wisconsin has not as yet experienced the decline represented at the national level, the age structure of the hunting community in Wisconsin demonstrates that having fewer hunters in the future is a demographic inevitability. While this presents a challenge, it also highlights a window of opportunity to stabilize and sustain Wisconsin's cherished hunting tradition. The age structure of Wisconsin's hunting community suggests we'll have the largest number of potential mentors we'll ever have to introduce people to hunting in the next decade. The mentoring opportunities proposed in AB672 enable the hunting community to safely leverage the currently large cohort of mentors to increase hunting opportunities all people age 10 and over. [Note – See Age Structure Charts]

The proposed mentoring opportunities will also aid in recruiting women into hunting. In the mid-40's cohort of licensed deer gun hunters, only 7% of the participants at that age are women. However, in the 12 year old cohort age group, females comprise nearly 21% of the licensed deer gun hunters. The proposed mentoring opportunities will likely result in recruiting more women of all ages by increasing opportunity for women through such programs as Becoming an Outdoors Woman, as well as through increased mentoring opportunities with parents and family members.

#### **WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS:**

In recent years, there has been considerable social research in an effort to determine the most effective approaches to hunter recruitment. Upon review of research, some key themes emerge: [See handout].

**“It takes a hunter to make a hunter”.** The social component of hunting is very important. Mentoring is a very important pathway to hunting participation. Researchers found that most all life long hunters talked about having a role model or mentor that caused them to identify with hunters. The frequency of participation, levels of interest in participation, measures of liking the sport, and current participation were all statistically significantly related to having been positively influenced by someone.

Competing demands for time is one factor often cited for not participating in hunting. Given the time stressed nature of society today, research suggests mentoring programs that remove barriers to participation and allow people to safely “test drive” a hunting experience with a relatively low investment of time is important.

One study conducted here in Wisconsin, based on interviews of 5000 hunters, found approximately eighty-percent (80%) came in through hunting families at younger ages, and approximately twenty percent (20%) came in during their early twenties. These hunters in their 20's were often recruited in a work situation by peers that hunted, or were recruited through marriage when a member of the family they married into recruited them into hunting. This research demonstrates the importance and potential effectiveness of the adult mentoring opportunities created by AB672.

Another important factor reported by hunters as an experience that caused them to be hunters was their first experience shooting a firearm. This supports the components in AB672 that provides for youth to target practice with firearms at any age under adult supervision.

In terms of passing on the conservation ethic, research at Cornell University found that participation with "wild" nature, such as experienced in hunting, **before age 11** is a **"particularly potent pathway"** toward shaping both environmental attitudes and behaviors in adulthood.

### **SUMMARY**

In summary, ultimately, creating the law that establishes a new hunter mentoring program is a legislative decision. The information we provide is in an effort to assist lawmakers in this decision. The proposed mentoring program with the combined controlled conditions of "one gun", "arms reach", and "one to one" mentoring is a good set of circumstances from a safety standpoint. The mentoring program removes barriers to participation and allows people to safely experience hunting with a relatively low investment of time. The proposed mentoring program creates circumstances that are responsive to the social conditions the research suggests are necessary to recruit more hunters. Giving youth the opportunity to hunt is a good alternative to other less desirable activities that can influence a young person. It also provides a healthy activity that gets people outside and exercising.

## **WHAT WOULD THE DNR LIKE TO SEE CHANGED IN THIS BILL**

A problem which exists under current law which could be corrected by this bill but is not, is the fact that under the provisions of s. 29.304(3)(b)3., and s. 984.60(3), Stats., a person that is 14 or 15 years of age may hunt or target practice with a firearm if they are certified under the hunter education program. But, a person who is 16 or 17 years of age may not target practice alone, even if they hold a hunter education certification. A 16 or 17 year old may hunt alone with a firearm if they hold a hunter education certificate, but may not target practice alone. They must be supervised by an adult to target practice with a firearm.

The department does not feel that the requirement under this bill that the DNR provide each person who purchases a hunting license without hunter education be provided with a pamphlet on hunter safety at the time of the sale is necessary. It will be an added cost and there is no way of assuring it will get into the hands of the mentor. Alternatively, information could be created and placed on the DNR website more cost effectively.

Under this bill a person ages 10 or 11, would also now be allowed to possess a firearm to hunt on a Deer Hunting Preserve or Bird Hunting Preserve, or to hunt certain small game animals on their parents land. But under this mentorship requirement, they would be required to hold a hunting approval. Hunting approvals are not required for hunting on such preserves, or for kids hunt rabbits, squirrels, raccoons, coyotes, foxes, woodchucks and beaver on their parents land. No exception is made for situations where a hunting approval is not required for the person doing the hunting. While this does not create any safety concerns, and would in fact likely result in some additional revenue for the department, we do not believe this was the intent of this bill, or that it is necessary. It could add to confusion for landowners and hunters hunting on preserves, not knowing they need a license when others do not.

## **EFFECTIVE DATE CONSIDERATIONS:**

**This bill does NOT establish a delayed effective date.**

Our Customer Service & Licensing Bureau has advised that they would need about a 3 month delay in the effective date of this bill from the date it is published to allow for the needed changes to be made to the Automated License Issuance System. The Department would also need time to develop, print and distribute the Hunter Safety publication required under this bill, if this provision is not removed.

The Department Recommends that this bill be amended so that it includes a delayed effective date that reads something like: "This act first applies to approvals issued on July 1, 2008."

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January 18, 2008

Wisconsin State Assembly  
Natural Resources Committee  
State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Natural Resources Committee Members:

The Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (WIAAP) voices its strong opposition to AB 672. As childhood health specialists, we feel current medical evidence indicates that 10 year olds have not yet obtained the developmental skills (strength, coordination, and decision-making ability) needed to safely use a gun while hunting, placing themselves and those around them at great risk for harm. WIAAP does not feel the mentoring practices outlined in the bill will adequately make up for the developmental issues stated above, as a "mentoring designee" can be as young as 18 years of age.

AB 672 also will reduce safety education requirements for the suggested youngest hunters and place future age adjustments in the sole hands of the Wisconsin DNR, leaving childhood health and safety experts out of future age discussions. The chapter is not anti-hunting and supports the sports heritage, tradition and value of being passed on to future generations here in Wisconsin. We also recognize the general concern voiced by hunting interest groups that fewer citizens are choosing to participate in the sport across the country. However, placing our children at increased risk for injury and death is not the way to stem the state's declining hunting trend.

The WIAAP opposes AB 672:

- At a minimum, children under age 12 are NOT developmentally ready to safely handle a gun while hunting.
- Harm, resulting from a child being placed in a situation they are not developmentally ready for is not the fault of the child.
- Harming another person at a young age can result in long lasting emotional disability for the involved child.
- Reducing safety education is not in the best interest of fostering a safe hunting environment.

Wisconsin State Assembly, Natural Resources Committee

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- Future debate on child hunting age should remain accessible for professionals involved in child health to cast their opinion.
- Placing children at risk is not the answer to Wisconsin's declining hunting participation trend.

Sincerely,

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

Wisconsin Chapter

Halim Hennes, MD, MS, FAAP  
President, WIAAP

Timothy E. Corden, MD, FAAP  
Chair, Legislative Committee, WIAAP

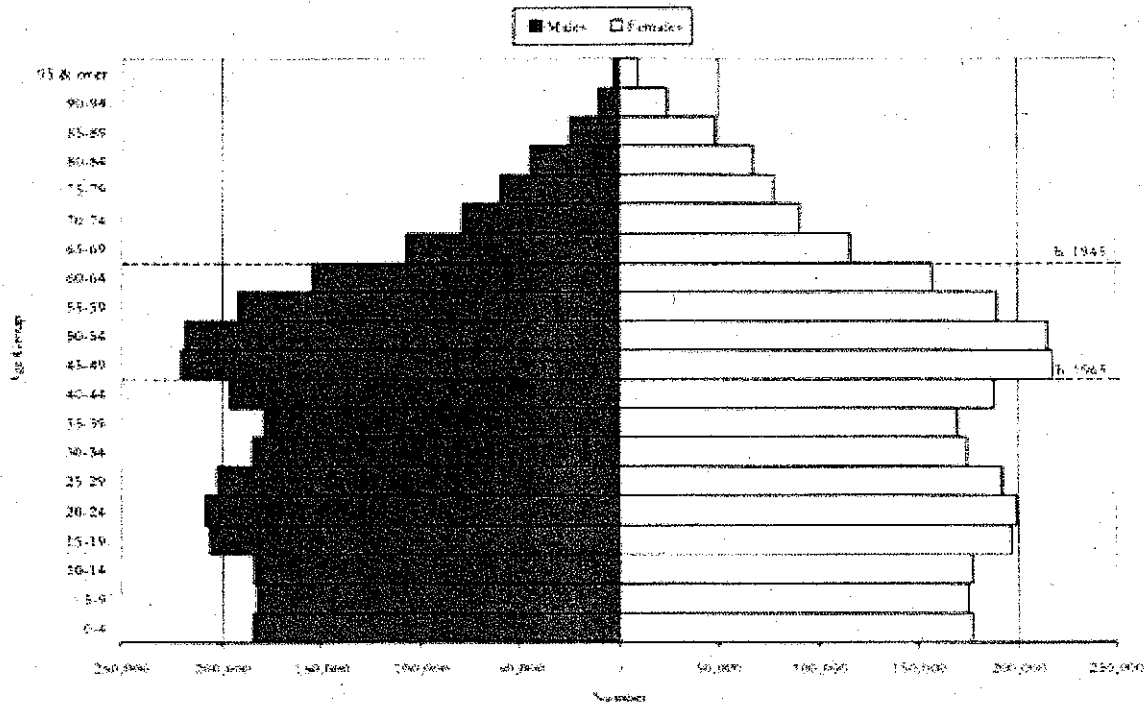
Jeffery Britton, MD, FAAP  
Chair; Committee on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention, WIAAP

Cc: Carl Eisenberg, MD, FAAP  
LuAnn Moraski, MD, FAAP  
Kathryn Nichol, MD, FAAP  
Patricia Quigley, MD  
Jeanine Swenson, MD, FAAP  
Ian Van Dinther, AAP State Government Affairs



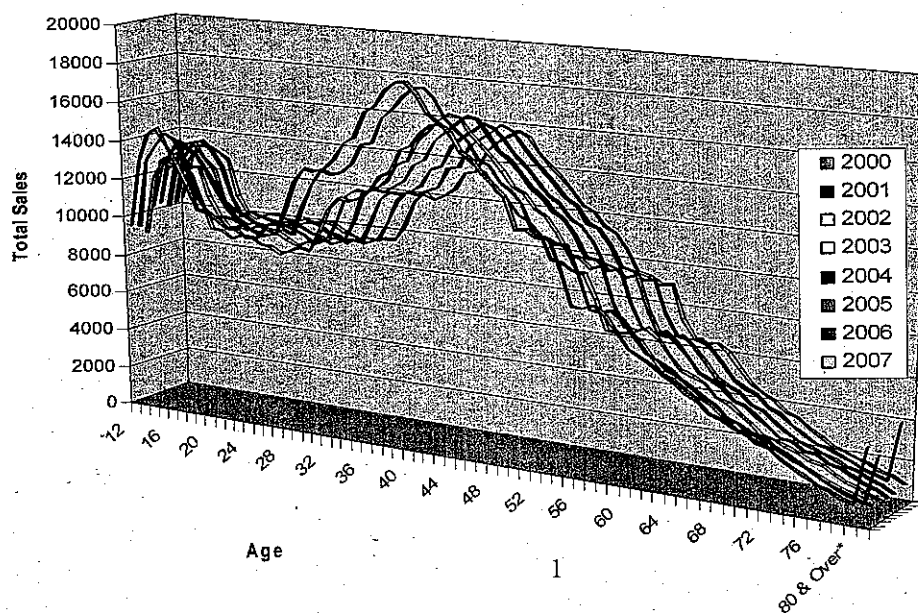
**DEMOGRAPHICS** - The aging of the baby boomer generation will result in a significant change in the age structure of society. Below is the forecasted age structure distribution by sex and age in Wisconsin for 2010. Note the high number in the age-cohort born between 1945 and 1965. Note the number people 1-14 years of age as compared to the number of people 45-55 years of age.

### 5-Year Age Group Pyramid by Sex, Wisconsin, 2010 Projection



**Source: Wisconsin Population Projections: 2000-2030 – WI Department of Administration – May 2002**

Below is the age distribution of licensed firearm deer hunters for the eight seasons (2000-2007). With the exception of the age 15-29 cohort, the age structure of the Wisconsin firearm deer hunting community somewhat mirrors the overall age structure in Wisconsin. The largest cohort age group currently represented is now in the mid-to-late forties.



An examination of these charts shows that within a decade it's a demographic inevitability that we'll have fewer hunters in the future than we have today. As the community ages, there will likely be an annual incremental small drop in participation each year over the next decade. Additionally, the population of hunters will be smaller in proportion to the overall population.

However, this also presents a window of opportunity to stabilize and sustain Wisconsin's cherished hunting tradition. For the next decade, we'll have the largest number of potential mentors we'll ever have who can introduce people to hunting in the coming years. In the future, it will be critical to increase opportunity for youth to be exposed to hunting in contexts that emphasize connecting to the natural world and the social aspects of hunting - spending time afield with family and friends, sharing stories, and creating memories. The mentoring provisions of AB672 are a safe tool that can be used to answer this challenge by using a currently large cohort of mentors to increase hunting opportunities for people of all ages.

### **RESEARCH ON HUNTER RECRUITMENT**

Research entitled "*Meeting the Challenge to Increase Participation in Hunting and Shooting*" by Jim Wentz and Phil Seng outline four stages of becoming a hunter: Awareness, Interest, Trial and Adoption. The proposed mentoring program allows a novice hunter to quickly go through the awareness and interest phases and onto the trial phase quickly. Once in this phase, they can then decide if they want to adopt hunting long term. The proposed mentoring program will allow many to get to the trial phase that may not otherwise have the opportunity.

Mark Duda, of Responsive Management, who published research entitled *Factors Related to Hunting and Fishing Participation Among the Nations Youth*, found mentoring is very important in hunting participation programs. Duda found that frequency of participation, levels of interest in participation, measures of liking the sport, and current participation were all statistically significantly related to having been positively influenced by someone.

Bob Norton, in *The Hunter - Developmental Stages and Ethics*, outlines research conducted by himself and the late Bob Jackson that also highlights the importance of mentoring. Drawing on interviews with over 5000 hunters, Norton and Jackson found the social element, or the "people to people component of hunting" was critically important. They found that most all life long hunters talked about having a role model or mentor that caused them to identify with hunters.

Norton and Jackson, also found two major points of entry into hunting. Based on interviews conducted, approximately eighty-percent (80%) came in through hunting families at younger ages, and approximately twenty percent (20%) came in during their early twenties. These hunters in their 20's were often recruited in a work situation by peers that hunted, or were recruited through marriage when a member of the family they married into recruited them into hunting. This research demonstrates the importance and potential effectiveness of the adult mentoring opportunities created by AB672.

Norton also highlights another very important factor reported by hunters as an experience that caused them to be hunters. It was their first experience shooting a firearm. Norton found that hunters reported a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of entering the adult world through carrying a firearm or bow, and that these were strong motivations for them to enter the hunter's world. This supports the components in AB672 that provides for youth to target practice with firearms at any age under adult supervision.

In terms of passing on the conservation ethic, the research *Nature and the Life Course: Pathways from Childhood Nature Experiences to Adult Environmentalism* by Nancy M. Wells of Cornell University finds that youth participation in wild nature, including hunting, led to positive adult environmental attitudes. Significantly, Wells also found that participation with “wild” nature, such as experienced in hunting, **before age 11** is a “**particularly potent pathway**” toward shaping both environmental attitudes and behaviors in adulthood. Given the importance of ensuring future generations understand the relationship between protecting our natural resources and our health, quality of life, and economic prosperity, this represents another potential future benefit yielded by increased mentoring opportunity

#### **Works Consulted:**

1. The Hunting Heritage Partnership – Most effective Methods – National Shooting Sports Foundation
2. Meeting the Challenge to Increase Participation in Hunting and Shooting by Jim Wentz and Phil Seng
3. Factors Related to Hunting and Fishing Participation Among the Nations Youth – Phase V: Final Report - Mark Duda, Responsive Management
4. The Hunter – Developmental Stages and Ethics – Robert Jackson and Bob Norton PhD
5. 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation – USFWS
6. Hunting in America – An Economic Engine and Conservation Powerhouse – Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.
7. Nature and the Life Course: Pathways from Childhood Nature Experiences to Adult Environmentalism, Nancy M. Wells – Cornell University
8. The American Sportsmen and the Origins of the Conservation Movement – John R Reiger
9. The Hunter in Conservation – The Council for Wildlife Conservation and Education.
10. Wisconsin Population Projections: 2000-2030 – WI Department of Administration – May 2002
11. The Sportsmen’s Voice: Participation in and Attitudes Toward Hunting and Fishing in the United States – Mark Duda, Responsive Management.

**Testimony in support of AB 672**  
**Youth and New Hunter Mentoring Legislation**  
**By: Thomas Thoresen January 16, 2007**

Dear Chairman Gunderson and members of the Assembly Natural Resources Committee, I am Thomas Thoresen and I have registered in favor of this legislation. The Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters of which I am Chair of the Board of Directors also registers in support. This enabling legislation found in AB 672 will have a positive effect for conservation and the wise use of our natural resources.

I have been an avid hunter and fisherman for over 40 years. I also retired from the DNR 3 ½ years ago as the Deputy Chief Conservation Warden. Prior to my retirement, I held many law enforcement positions in DNR including Field Conservation Warden, Recreational Safety Warden and Section Chief in the Bureau of Law Enforcement. I have been a Hunter Education Instructor for over 29 years and I have looked at this legislation and it deserves your support for multiple reasons:

- This legislation would allow a person who has not yet taken the Hunter Education course to go into the field and experience a hunting opportunity with family/friends who now can't let them hunt with them. Mentoring a new hunter is a positive experience and a way to interest new hunters in conservation.
- This bill would fix the problem of conflicting statutes in chapter 29 and 948 regarding target practice by those under 12 with supervision.
- The limit of one firearm for the novice and mentor combined, the mentor required to be a Hunter Education graduate or a licensed hunter born before January 1, 1973 **and** the requirement that the mentor and novice be within arms reach addresses any safety concerns.

This legislation would allow families to start mentoring/involving our sons and daughters at an earlier age with no adverse safety risks. It would allow people to take their spouses, significant others or friends with them, buy a license and see if they want to get to hunt on their own in the future. I remember this personally from a few years ago when I had both my sons with me during a late Oct. "T Zone" deer hunt. My licensed 13 year old son could hunt deer but my 11 year old was prevented from a license and pursuing a deer even with me right there. My 11 year old was really wishing he could partake in the hunt but was restricted. As a parent, while it was good to see his excitement in being there, I reflected on something Drs. Jackson and Norton told us Hunter Education Instructors in the mid-1980's about teaching and learning... "Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I'll remember but **involve me and I'll understand**". We should be able to involve people through this hunter-mentoring enabling legislation to new hunters of all ages.

**TESTIMONY ON AB 672**  
**ASSEMBLY NATURAL RESOURCE COMMITTEE**  
**JANUARY 16, 2008**

Dan Davies  
Former VP for United Foundation For Disabled Archers  
Volunteer youth archery instructor  
Shooting Staff Member for several major archery corporations  
Adoptive Father of 10 yr old daughter (adopted at age 9)

As a long time member of a national disabled archery organization, which integrates adults and youth into the hunting activity, and a father of a recently adopted daughter, now age 10, I would like to see the learn to hunt program continued and expanded.

This is a program that I enjoyed with my daughter last year. Almost since the day she came home from Russia, she has wanted to hunt with us. The "Learn to Hunt" program allowed us to take her out turkey hunting last year, though for only 1 day. This is so important to my wife and I as it enhances the bonding with our new daughter at a time when her internal clock is just beginning to tell her she should be pulling away from her parents and forming her own identity. This is true not only of adoptive parents, but of any parent of a pre-teen and teenager.

When you delay the hunting age until 12, you miss, possibly forever, an opportunity to get your child involved in this activity. By the age of 10 and 11 kids are starting to get more involved with their own friends, team sports, and school activities. Parents have a harder and harder time involving their kids in family activities, and as we all know, it is parental involvement that keeps kids out of trouble, off drugs, and away from too young sex. It is parental involvement that keeps a kid on a good educational track, so they can become good, productive adults. If a child is with their parent, learning to shoot a bow, or a gun, they are not doing drugs. If they are camping with their parents, while learning the habitats and foods, the sleeping places and patterns of the animals, they are not having sex. If they are focused on proper shooting form, their brains are learning how to concentrate, enhancing their learning abilities. Did you know there is evidence that learning archery helps develop the proper brain function that allows parents to take children off Ritalin?

As that 10 yr old, who develops a love of hunting gets older; 16 or 17, or 18, and off to college, hunting camp may be that one time of year when parents get that opportunity to connect with their teen. It is a time, unlike the hurry of holidays, when the world slows down, just a little bit, and that teen is willing to spend time with their family. This is a time when stories are told, and memories and history are shared, and traditions passed down. A time when a teen lets their guard down, and shares what is going on in their life. I would love to see this program continue and expand to allow more opportunities for our youngsters to get involved in hunting before their enthusiasm wanes. I'd love to see the hunting age reduced to 10 yrs old, with "arms length of experienced hunter" restrictions. I'd like to see the experienced hunter restriction expand to include "with hunter safety training completed," as there are many experienced hunters who were grandfathered out of hunter's safety, which I believe is important to pass on to our kids.

As you can see, my family hunts. Both my wife and I got a deer this year, and I think my daughter, who spent her first year at deer camp, was the most enthusiastic of the three of us, as she loves venison. Unfortunately, we had to leave her back at the cabin with our 15 yr old exchange student, anticipating her opportunity to hunt...2 years from now.

She is disappointed that her birthday is in Feb; 3 months after deer-gun season. I hope she will not have to wait 2 years.

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# Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

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## Wisconsin Wildlife Federation Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 672----Hunter Mentoring Bill

Good morning, Chairman Gunderson and Members of the Assembly Natural Resources Committee. My name is George Meyer. I am the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation. The Federation is comprised of one hundred and fifty-eight hunting, fishing and trapping organizations located throughout the State of Wisconsin. The Wildlife Federation studied the issue of hunter mentoring in depth for over three years and strongly supports Assembly Bill 672, the Hunter Mentoring Bill.

This bill provides the opportunity for new hunters of any age over the age of ten to take part in hunting under very controlled and safe circumstances without the necessity of taking a hunter education course. The Wisconsin Wildlife Federation is very hunter safety conscious and would not support this bill if in fact we were not fully convinced that this bill would insure safe hunts. We worked closely with the bill's primary author and other conservation organizations in framing measures that will assure hunting safety while allowing individuals to obtain a first opportunity to experience hunting.

The conditions that the Federation believed strongly in have been incorporated into this bill. The mentoring situation is restricted to situations where it is one mentor with one student hunter and the student hunter must be within the arm's reach of the mentor. This assures that the mentor has direct physical control of the student's actions. The Federation felt strongly that in these mentoring situations that there only be one firearm. This insures that the sole focus of attention of the mentor will be on the student's hunting activities. The bill provides that the mentor will have accomplished a hunter education course or otherwise be an experienced hunter. Lastly every student in a mentoring situation will be issued a pamphlet emphasizing the basic principles of hunter safety. This mentoring program is a highly controlled situation and will provide the student a highly safe and quality hunting experience.

You have heard testimony from the Department of Natural Resources Hunter Safety program that over 31 states either have no minimum hunting

age or have minimum ages less than 12. The facts bear out that youth hunting under these circumstances has been very safe and most of those states do not require the controlled restrictions on the mentoring experience that are proposed in Assembly Bill 672. We have also had excellent experience in youth hunting in this state for over ten years under the Learn to Hunt program.

One further point of consideration in your deliberations is that prior to the adoption of the Hunter Education statute, it was legal to hunt under the age of twelve in the State of Wisconsin for certain small game. Many of the middle to older age hunters in the state today in fact did engage in hunting at a younger age than eight years old.

Assembly Bill 672 also allows the possession of firearms by youth under the age of twelve which will allow young men and women to engage in target practice at an earlier age. This will enable young men and women to become more skilled in the safe use of firearms before they get involved in actual hunting and will allow them to develop skills to become more proficient in competitive shooting. The current prohibition against target shooting by individuals under the age of twelve is not well known at the current time and we believe that there are many inadvertent violations of the prohibition.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today and we encourage your strong support for Assembly Bill 672.

Submitted by George Meyer  
Executive Director  
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

January 16, 2008



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## Yes to lowering the hunting age

**N**ormally, we're not big advocates of getting more guns into the hands of minors. But when the proposal involves safe ways of getting more kids involved with hunting, we're willing to listen. More than that, we're willing to support the idea, being pushed by

CONSERVATION  
AND WILDLIFE

legislators such as Rep. Scott Gunderson (R-Waterford) and groups such as the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, that it's time to lower the legal age for hunting in Wisconsin.

A bill approved by the Assembly and now in the Senate would lower the age to 8 if the hunting youth was within arms' reach of an adult mentor and as long as there was only one gun shared by the mentor and the youth. There's room for compromise here. Maybe change the age to 10, as originally proposed last year, although we're not opposed to 8. Maybe require that every new hunter in Wisconsin take a safety course before setting out into the woods for

squirrel or deer.

Ultimately, of course, parents are the best judges of whether their kids should hunt. Some might be ready at 8; some won't be ready at 15. The proposal recognizes the need for flexibility and leaves the decision in the best hands. But the bottom line is, lowering the hunting age makes sense as a way of replenishing the ranks of hunters, who are so necessary to the state's conservation and wildlife management efforts.

The first concern, of course, must be the safety of hunters, which is a good reason to require a hunter safety course. Still, advocates of the bill argue that the safest hunter category is youths hunting with adults and that states with lower hunting ages or no age limits report good hunting safety records.

Critics point out that more hunting accidents took place among 12- to 17-year-olds (29%, or 13 incidents) in 2004 than in any other age group, according to the state Department of Natural Resources. But in 2003, the DNR reported that the rate was 6% (two incidents) for that age group.



JOURNAL SENTINEL FILES

**If Wisconsin lowers the hunting age, safety must remain the highest priority.**

And nationally, in 2002, there were 20 reported hunting-related shooting incidents among more than 1.7 million supervised young hunters, according to figures supplied by advocates of a lower age.

So youth hunting is relatively safe. So what? Well, the problem is that while hunters may not be a dying breed, they apparently are not a rapidly replenishing breed. For every 100 hunters who quit the sport, 53 hunters start. Kids who start playing soccer or football or

baseball at 8 or younger may not have much time for or interest in hunting four years later. That wasn't the case before 1973, when the current age limit of 12 was enacted. Many of today's adult hunters started before they were 12 and developed a lifelong interest in the sport.

The state needs that lifelong interest. The state's deer herd, for example, is right now about as big as it has ever been. Without hunters, the state couldn't come close to keeping the herd's numbers in check. And without the money from the fees paid by hunters and anglers, many of the state's conservation programs would die of starvation.

People other than hunters also enjoy the state's great outdoors, of course. And the state could do more to promote other recreational activities—from all-terrain riding to cross-country skiing to bird-watching.

But skiers and bird-watchers don't cull deer herds. Hunters do. Keeping their numbers up is in everyone's interest.





*"Dedicated to the Conservation of  
Wisconsin's Waterfowl and Wetland Resources"*

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1/16/2007

Rep. Gunderson  
Assembly Committee on Natural Resources  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Rep. Gunderson and Committee Members,

The Wisconsin Waterfowl Association Inc. is a statewide conservation organization. On behalf of our membership we wish to support Assembly Bill 672, relating to: the minimum age for hunting and possessing a firearm, age specific restrictions for hunting and possessing a firearm while hunting, requirements for obtaining a hunting certificate of accomplishment and establishing a hunting mentorship program.

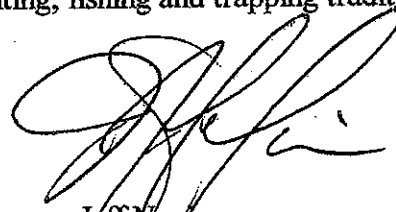
Our organization supports the bill as written. However, our Board of Directors suggests that the committee consider an amendment that would require ten year olds to go through the Wisconsin Hunter Safety Program.

It is important that we all work diligently to support recruitment of new hunters. Hunting is a safe, healthy, family oriented activity that provides great benefits to the natural resources of this state. There are many challenges ahead that will test our resolve as hunters. We must never forget the gift that those conservationists of the past gave us, the opportunity to enjoy and experience our outdoor treasures and traditions.

We owe it to the generations that follow us to do the same. Our success in this endeavor will be largely determined by our ability to work together. The future is being written now, we will determine whether it includes our hunting, fishing and trapping traditions.

Sincerely,

  
Dale Arenz  
President

  
Jeff Nanna  
Executive Director

## **Youth Target Shooting & mentoring, AB672**

**I am in support of AB672 and urge your support for many reasons.**

- 1. I am involved with a youth outdoor skills day in central Wisconsin which completed it's 18<sup>th</sup> year in April of last year. There were nearly 500 kids and over 700 people overall in attendance. That youth day is hosted by The Ruffed Grouse Society [The lead organization], Whitetails Unlt, The Wild Turkey Federation, Ducks unlimited, The Wi Trappers Assc., Quality Deer Mgnt Assc., 4H Shooting Sports, Central Wi Sportsman's Club, and many law enforcement and caring individuals. All participants are required to be accompanied by an adult and they must sit through a hunter safety film plus briefing by a Hunter Ed Instructor prior to participating in any activities. Under the present law these kids who are not 12 years old cannot shoot shotgun or 22 rifle even if parents say they can. It has been the belief of most parents and our host organizations that the parent should decide if and when their child is ready to target shoot. Most people are unaware that taking their children out to do some target practice is illegal.**
- 2. I am also asking you to support this legislation because of mentoring opportunity that it provides. I am involved with Whitetails Unlt, The WI Buck & Bear Club, and have been on the Conservation Congress and the Big Game Committee for 20 years. Over this time I have had many opportunities to speak to groups, measure hunters trophies, and listen to many opinions that concern hunters. I have heard often from older hunters that they wish they could just take their grandkids hunting with them even if they did not hunt themselves. Others have wished they could convince a new Son In Law to try hunting. That person doesn't know if they will like it and they would have to go to Hunter Ed which many times keeps them from trying it once.**
- 3. I personally have taken first time hunters out both in the youth hunt and in the regular seasons. It felt so good this year to mentor two boys this past season who lost their dad to ALS. One of the last things he did was to bring them to our youth day and they are forever hooked on the outdoors. They got one Deer and loved everything about the experience.**

**Sincerely Submitted  
Marlin Laidlaw  
Marshfield Wi.**

**715-676-2202**